

DEADLY ABORIGINAL EDUCATORS

Esther Djayhurrnga

Educating the children Two-Ways



ESTHER'S STORY

Esther Djayhurrnga commenced her career in Education in 1982 as an Assistant Teacher at Gunbalanya (then Oenpelli) School. After qualifying as a teacher in 1986, Esther taught Early Years classes and made clear her aspirations for leadership.

In the early 1990s Esther had a significant role in the Aboriginal Schools Curriculum Materials Project (ASCMP), and worked for DoE in Darwin for two years on curriculum development tailored for remote Indigenous schools. Esther then commenced a pathway to Principalship program, and was the successful applicant for the Gunbalanya Principal role in 2001. Esther is now the longest serving remote Indigenous Principal in DoE history. In 2010, after years of lobbying, Esther established the first Co-Principalship in the NT in partnership with trusted colleague Sue Trimble. Together they have led Gunbalanya school toward a Two-Way Teaching and Learning model where Bininj and Balanda (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) worlds and ways come together to prepare students for a future as active and informed citizens with strength in language and culture. In pursuit of community-driven schooling, Esther, Sue and the School Council initiated a Seasonal School Calendar founded on local cultural patterns and Gunbalanya School became the first and only remote Indigenous Independent School in the NT.

Esther Djayhurrnga completed Teacher Education at Batchelor College (BIITE) in 1986, a Bachelor of Arts in Education through Deakin University (1997)

and qualifications in Education Administration through Adelaide University (2002). Participating in numerous Government consultative processes, Esther has quietly influenced policy and practice for nearly four decades, advocating for community-driven remote Indigenous schools. Following the release of 'Learning lessons: an independent review of indigenous education in the Northern Territory' (1999), Esther became Co-Chair of the Implementation Committee; Esther has been sought out by Federal and Territory Members of Parliament for her insights throughout her Principalship; her presence in online media platforms and many conference presentations speaks to her influence as a leader in Education. Esther received the NT Award for Excellence in Leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education in 2012, and shared the Regional Principal of the Year Award with Sue Trimble in 2018.

Gunbalanya Independent Public School Board accepted the 2019 Chief Minister's award for 'Strengthening local capability and leadership capacity'. As Co-Principals, Esther and Sue have overseen the graduation ceremonies of Year 12 students annually since 2013, Gunbalanya being the first remote community school to graduate NTCET students on campus.

Esther Djayhurrnga is integral to the success stories of countless students, teachers and leaders in Territory Education, and all those who spend time with her are in awe of her resilience and sense of purpose in achieving educational and social outcomes for Indigenous Peoples. Citing her father as her greatest inspiration, Esther was born to share, and grow others. She is unique in her lifelong dedication to NT Education, a community leader standing up for her beliefs in the face of adversity. Esther's fingerprints can be found on generations of Education policy and practice in service of remote Indigenous Education. She is fulfilling the wishes of Elders, to educate the children Two-Ways.

